

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

Form Approved
OMB No. 0704-0188

Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Washington Headquarters Service, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302, and to the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reduction Project (0704-0188) Washington, DC 20503.

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1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 24-04-2013	2. REPORT TYPE Master of Military Studies Research Paper	3. DATES COVERED (From - To) September 2012 - April 2013		
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Special Operations Command and the Selected Marine Corps Reserve		5a. CONTRACT NUMBER N/A		
		5b. GRANT NUMBER N/A		
		5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER N/A		
6. AUTHOR(S) Wilson, Richard W., Major, USMCR		5d. PROJECT NUMBER N/A		
		5e. TASK NUMBER N/A		
		5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER N/A		
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) USMC Command and Staff College Marine Corps University 2076 South Street Quantico, VA 22134-5068		8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER N/A		
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) N/A		10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S) N/A		
		11. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY REPORT NUMBER N/A		
12. DISTRIBUTION AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Unlimited				
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES N/A				
14. ABSTRACT After seven years of existence, the time has come for the development of an operational MARSOC Reserve Component capable of carrying out SOF missions, enhancing the Command's effectiveness, and maintaining precious Marine Critical Skills Operator assets within the Command. The creation of a MARSOC Selected Marine Corps Reserve Marine Special Operations Company is entirely feasible, appropriate, and necessary in order to capitalize on operational and fiscal opportunities from USSOCOM, as well as to maintain the time and resources invested in Marine Critical Skills Operators as they transition from active to reserve military service.				
15. SUBJECT TERMS U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Special Operations Command, MARSOC, Marine Special Operations, Selected Marine Corps Reserve, Special Operations Forces (SOF)				
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF: a. REPORT Unclass		17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UU	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON Marine Corps University / Command and Staff College
b. ABSTRACT Unclass		19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (Include area code) (703) 784-3330 (Admin Office)		
c. THIS PAGE Unclass				

United States Marine Corps
Command and Staff College
Marine Corps University
2076 South Street
Marine Corps Combat Development Command
Quantico, Virginia 22134-5068

MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

TITLE: US. Marine Corps Forces, Special Operations Command and the Selected Marine Corps Reserve

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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AY 12-13

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Preface

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the need for and validity of the development of an operational Selected Marine Corps Reserve (SMCR) unit for United States Marine Corps Forces, Special Operations Command, also known as MARSOC. As the only Marine in the United States Marine Corps who is both an Active Reserve officer and also a school-trained Marine Special Operations Officer, this subject is very near to my heart. MARSOC, as an organization, has made incredible advances since its birth in February 2006 and has firmly established itself as a key operational component of the United States Special Operations Command. Now is the appropriate time to examine an integral piece of the Marine Corps Total Force that MARSOC does not currently have, the Selected Marine Corps Reserve unit. This paper will discuss why the creation of a MARSOC SMCR unit is necessary and feasible. Further, it will examine the most appropriate methods to create such a unit.

I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Michelle Dolfini-Reed of the Center for Naval Analysis for her assistance in my research. I would also like to thank Major General Darrell Moore, USMCR, and Major General Mark Clark, USMC. These men, in their positions as the Director of Reserve Affairs for the Marine Corps and Commander, U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Special Operations Command, respectively, both provided invaluable support for this endeavor. I sincerely hope that this idea comes to fruition in the near future.

Executive Summary

Title: U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Special Operations Command and the Selected Marine Corps Reserve

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Thesis: After seven years of existence, the time has come for the development of an operational MARSOC Reserve Component capable of carrying out SOF missions, enhancing the Command's effectiveness, and maintaining precious Marine Critical Skills Operator assets within the Command.

Discussion: The U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Special Operations command has achieved many milestones since its February 2006 creation. In almost seven years, it has fielded three Marine Special Operations Battalions that have participated in USSOCOM missions around the globe, including the war in Afghanistan. It has manned several critical supporting institutions, including the Marine Special Operations Support Group and the Marine Special Operations Intelligence Battalion, both of which provide critical support to special operations Marines that make their mission accomplishment possible. It has developed the Marine Special Operations School, which has successfully carried out the critical task of assessing, selecting, and training Marine Critical Skills Operators, or CSOs, in basic and advanced skills that allow them to carry out the special operations missions that are assigned to them. It has achieved the creation and validation of a training pipeline that can award a primary MOS to enlisted Marine CSOs and an additional MOS for Special Operations Officers, allowing for permanent assignment to the Marine SOF ranks. Most importantly, it has earned its place as a competent SOF component of USSOCOM, joining the ranks of the other elite branches of U.S. military service. The next great milestone for MARSOC is to follow in the footsteps of its sister USSOCOM components and create an operational Reserve unit capable of enhancing its warfighting capability. This will be necessary not only to open the doors for future operational commitments and funding, but also to attract and keep highly-qualified Marine CSOs in the organization should they decide to leave active duty. There are realistic avenues of developing the requisite manpower structure, the most feasible of which would be the realignment of existing Marine Corps Reserve structure to meet the needs of a MARSOC SMCR unit. There are also realistic options of the provision of administrative, logistic, and facility support to such a unit at the existing command headquarters. Special Operations Reserve units have and will continue to play a vital role of in the accomplishment of USSOCOM missions. After seven years of existence, the time has come for the development of an operational MARSOC Reserve Component capable of carrying out SOF missions, enhancing the Command's effectiveness, and holding on to precious Marine CSO assets.

Conclusion: The creation of a MARSOC Selected Marine Corps Reserve Marine Special Operations Company is entirely feasible, appropriate, and necessary in order to capitalize on operational and fiscal opportunities from USSOCOM, as well as to maintain the time and resources invested in Marine Critical Skills Operators as they transition from active to reserve military service.

Introduction

Since its birth, the United States of America has used irregular forces in combat. During the American Revolution, guerilla fighters such as Francis Marion, the legendary “Swamp Fox,” used indirect tactics to fight the numerically and militarily superior British Army.¹ Interestingly enough, Marion and a great majority of his compatriots who fought against colonial rule were not professional military officers, but were instead “citizen-soldiers.” These part-time warriors laid the foundations of a proud American tradition of Reserve military service. In most of the major wars fought by the United States, Reserve soldiers, fighting in regular and irregular military forces, have played a major role. This trend has continued to the present day in the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Reserve special operations forces, or SOF, in particular, have been heavily used to conduct special operations missions in support of the United States operational and strategic objectives.

The United States Marine Corps, Special Operations Command, universally known as MARSOC, as the newest member of the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) has also played a pivotal role in the current conflicts since its creation in February 2006. However, MARSOC is the only component of USSOCM that does not possess an operational Reserve component comprised of highly-trained Marine critical skills operators, or CSOs. Because of this, MARSOC, as an institution, is missing out on significant operational missions and funding, and is running the risk of losing its most valuable commodity – the Marine special operators that transition from active to reserve service. After seven years of existence, the time has come for the development of an operational MARSOC Reserve Component capable of carrying out SOF missions, enhancing the Command’s effectiveness, and maintaining precious Marine CSO assets within the Command.

History of USSOCOM

In order to fully understand the importance and relevance of developing a Marine SOF Reserve capability, the history of U.S. SOF components, active and reserve, as well as the history of MARSOC itself must be examined. Today, every branch of the United States military has a representative component at United States Special Operations Command, or USSOCOM. USSOCOM was created as a result of the watershed Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 and the Nunn-Cohen Amendment to the National Defense Organization Act of 1987, which mandated the creation of a unified SOF Command.² This new command, based out of MacDill Air Force Base in Florida, is a four-star level command with the responsibility of preparing U.S. SOF forces of carrying out assigned missions as well as planning for and conducting special operations missions, when directed.³

Initially, the main components of USSOCOM included the U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC), the U.S. Air Force Special Operations Command (USAFSOC), the U.S. Navy Special Warfare Command (NAVSPECWARCOM), and the multi-service Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC). Many units of these SOF branches predated this landmark legislation. Army Special Forces had been in existence since 1952 with the creation of the 10th Special Forces Group, although the lineage of this elite group can be traced back to the mid 1700's during the French and Indian War.⁴ United States Navy special operators, known as SEALs (an acronym meaning Sea, Air, and Land) were established in 1961 and saw extensive service in Vietnam, although they had numerous precursors dating back to the World War II era.⁵ Prior to the creation of SOCOM in 1987, these SOF elements fell directly under the auspices of their respective services.

History of Reserve Special Operations Forces

Reserve forces have long been seen as a necessity for all components of the U.S. military.

In 1962, George Fielding Eliot made this statement:

The United States will continue to need part-time (citizen) soldiers as well as full-time (regular) soldiers because we must live for the foreseeable future in a world in which we shall be continually confronted with a series of emergencies of varying dimensions. We may-as at present-have to face two or three actual or potential emergencies at the same time, in widely separated parts of the world and requiring widely different types of responsive action. At other times we may have only one emergency situation, or now and then none at all for a while. If we depend on full-time regular soldiers entirely-for the Army's part in dealing with these recurrent threats-we shall be compelled permanently to maintain a regular Army of sufficient size to satisfy our *maximum* possible requirements for ground troops. This would be economically disastrous and politically infeasible.⁶

However, the Johnson Administration did not choose to mobilize the Reserve Component as a whole during the Vietnam War, choosing instead to rely on the draft to fill the ranks of deploying military forces.⁷ This trend changed during the Nixon administration in the early 1970's during the when the draft was ended and the size of the standing Active Component military forces was reduced. This created the idea of a military "Total Force," which meant that future military solutions would include considerations of both Active and Reserve forces. This was explained by then-Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird in the 1972 Department of Defense Annual Report to Congress in the following manner:

Members of the National Guard and Reserve, instead of draftees, will be the initial and primary source for augmentation of the active forces in any future emergency requiring a rapid and substantial expansion of the active forces...[This] requires that the capability and mobilization readiness of Guard and Reserve units be promptly and effectively enhanced.⁸

Since then, this Total Force approach has continually been embraced by the U.S. Armed forces, including SOF components. Thus, for the U.S. Army, Navy, and Air Force, the evolution of SOF units included the development of operational Reserve components.

The National Guard 19th and 20th Special Forces Groups comprise the Army Special Forces Reserve components for USASOC. With respective headquarters in Draper, Utah and Birmingham, Alabama, a total of thirty-four different Army National Guard Special Forces units are spread throughout the continental United States.⁹ The 19th and 20th Special Forces Groups were constituted in 1961, along with the 11th and 12th Reserve Special Forces Groups, as part of the Army National Guard and Reserve structure. By 1974, as the Vietnam War came to a conclusion, the rapid departure of Special Forces Soldiers from active duty led to the deactivation of several active Special Forces Groups, leaving only 5th, 7th, and 10th Groups in the Active Component. The number of Reserve Component Special Forces Groups remained at four, leaving a place for these transitioning Special Forces soldiers to find a home after their transition from active service.¹⁰

Although the 11th and 12th Special Forces Groups were deactivated in the mid-1990's, each of these Reserve and National Guard units actively participated in SOF missions throughout the globe during the 1970's through the 1990's, including service in Operation Desert Storm in 1991.¹¹ Since the horrific events of 9/11, units of the 19th and 20th Special Forces Group have conducted numerous deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan in support of the Global War on Terror.¹² Today, the approximately 2,000 Special Forces soldiers of these two Groups constitute about 19% of total uniformed Army Special Forces personnel.¹³

Today, the U.S. Naval Special Warfare Group 11(NSWG-11) is the home of all U.S. Navy Reserve SOF. It is comprised of two Reserve SEAL teams, SEAL Team 17 and SEAL Team 18, which are based in Coronado, California and Little Creek, Virginia, respectively. Each of these Reserve SEAL Teams is made up of approximately 700 Reserve personnel located throughout the United States.¹⁴ The Reserve SEAL Team concept was first developed in 1975 in

the post-Vietnam era. Much like for the Army Special Forces, this time period saw a significant number of SEALs leave active duty Teams due to decreased manning levels. This led to the creation of the first Reserve SEAL Teams in 1975. In his book, *Navy SEALS: A Complete History from World War II to Present*, author Kevin Dockery recorded the following concerning these Teams:

Old Teammates who had left the SEALs came streaming back. Men who had gone on to very successful civilian careers would travel for hundreds of miles to be part of their Teams again. Doctors, lawyers, police officers, school-teachers-all leaped at the chance to once again run, shoot, jump from planes, dive, and blow things up. They were an invaluable resource in the form of highly qualified, experienced, and capable Teammates.¹⁵

Qualified Teammates are still found in the ranks of NSWG-11. Since 9/11, Navy Reserve SOF forces have made significant contributions in Naval Special Warfare operations throughout the globe.¹⁶

The U.S. Air Force Reserve SOF components are the 919th Special Operations Wing and the Air National Guard Special Operations Wing, based out of Florida and Pennsylvania. Each of these units has provided unique capabilities, including the only airborne psychological broadcasting unit in SOCOM, in support of SOCOM operations.¹⁷ Like both of these squadrons, all Reserve SOF units provide additional capability for each of the components of USSOCOM to participate in missions that are required to be performed around the world. Each of these SOF Reserve components has utilized and deployed units to every major U.S. Combatant Command (COCOM). As direct U.S. military involvement in Iraq ended in 2011 and is projected to end in Afghanistan in 2014, the demand for the indirect approach used by SOF forces will increase because of the lower cost and smaller footprint that they create.¹⁸ This demand will include an increased use of SOF Reserve forces, leaving them more relevant than ever to the continued defense of the nation.

History of MARSOC

At the time of the creation of USSOCOM, the Marine Corps, under the leadership of then-Commandant General Alfred M. Gray, declined to provide a service SOF component to the new command. Instead, the Marine Corps developed the Marine Expeditionary Unit-Special Operations Capable (MEU (SOC)) concept, which added to the existing MEU structure a Force Reconnaissance platoon capable of conducting missions within the special operations spectrum. This remained the status quo until February 2006, when then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld mandated that the Marine Corps contribute an operational component to USSOCOM.¹⁹ MARSOC was born.

Despite the zeal from the office of the Secretary of Defense and the enthusiasm of the Marine Corps to follow its new marching orders, the creation of a new USSOCOM service component was not a simple task. To fill the operational ranks of the new MARSOC Table of Organization (T/O), which is the document that prescribes the organization and staffing of a specific unit, the Marine Corps drew heavily upon its existing Reconnaissance community to foot the manpower bill. The Reconnaissance, or Recon, Marines, with their Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) 0321 designation, were well-trained and experienced in some of the types of missions that fell within the SOF spectrum, particularly Direct Action and Special Reconnaissance.²⁰ It was determined that these specially-trained Recon Marines would comprise the newly-created 1st and 2nd Marine Special Operations Battalions (MSOB). Additional units that were created in the MARSOC organizational structure included the Foreign Military Training Unit (FMTU) whose operators were primarily comprised of basic infantry Marines. The moniker for this organization was later changed, first to the Marine Special Operations Advisor Group (MSOAG), and later to the Marine Special Operations Regiment, which now is in

the chain of command over three MSOBs. Also created were the Marine Special Operations Support Group (MSOSG), which included the headquarters and support elements for the command, and the Marine Special Operations School (MSOS), which held the mission of providing the training pipelines for the assessment, selection, and training of those who would become Marine CSOs.²¹

As MARSOC filled out its ranks, it also struggled to find its organizational niche within the USSOCOM world. This was a world that had been dominated by the other branches of service since 1987, and each component guarded its operational territory with jealousy. The U.S. Army Special Forces were undisputed masters of Unconventional Warfare on the ground while the U.S. Navy SEALs dominated the water realms of the battlefield. The MARSOC leadership soon divided into two separate schools of thought pertaining to future visions of what a special operations Marine should be. In general, those Marines that came from the Marine Recon community envisioned a MARSOC operator in the mold of a U.S. Navy SEAL, amphibious warriors from the sea who specialized in performing Direct Action raids and high-risk Special Reconnaissance missions. Other leaders, particularly those with a conventional infantry background, embraced the mold created by the U.S. Army Special Forces soldier, whose Unconventional Warfare and Foreign Internal Defense capabilities, in particular, were seen as the pathway to relevance in the SOF world. Ultimately, it was decided that a Marine Special Operator would have the ability to perform the Direct Action, Special Reconnaissance, Foreign Internal Defense, and Counterinsurgency SOF core activities, although training in Unconventional Warfare was given to the initial ITC class.²² A complete list of the SOF core activities and their definitions are available in Appendix A.

Making a MARSOC Critical Skills Operator

The MARSOC institution that shoulders the ultimate responsibility for the successful creation of a Marine special operator is the Marine Special Operations School, or MSOS. The MSOS mission statement includes, but is not limited to, the following core tasks:

- Conduct a formal Assessment and Selection program
- Conduct an entry-level Special Operations training course to train NCOs and company grade officers for special operations assignments within MARSOC
- Conduct MARSOC's component exercise program
- Conduct Special Operations advanced and specialty courses
- Develop MARSOF standards, doctrine and Tactics, Techniques and Procedures
- Serve as MARSOC's proponent for weapons and optics requirements
- Serve as the training and education link between MARSOC, USMC and SOCOM component SOF schools to support MARSOC requirements²³

The first two of these two bullets will be examined in further detail, because they directly pertain to the creation of a MARSOC special operator. With a striking similarity to the U.S. Army Special Forces Assessment and Selection (SFAS), the MARSOC Assessment and Selection, or A&S, is a three week program designed to test a Marine CSO candidate's physical and mental endurance, leadership ability, as well as his potential to work with others in an austere environment with little outside support. This assessment is a combination of physical, mental, and psychological evaluations and is designed to find the right combination of qualities that are requisite in a Marine CSO.²⁴

An important emphasis must be placed on the psychological evaluation of the individual Marine. Even if a candidate successfully completes all of the physical and mental challenges and endures to the final days of A&S, he must ultimately face an evaluation panel which will look at his total performance and evaluation in fine detail. Many Marines who face this panel are simply thanked for their efforts but told that they are not what MARSOC is looking for in its special operations ranks. The sheer amount of effort and resources that are allotted to this relatively

short endeavor are considerable, for both the individual Marines vying to become special operators as well as for MARSOC as an institution.

Those Marines who are successfully selected at A&S have only completed the first part of their journey towards becoming a MARSOC special operator. Their next step is to attend the MARSOC Individual Training Course, or ITC. According to its mission statement, ITC “is a physically and mentally challenging 7-month course designed to produce MARSOC CSOs who can operate across the spectrum of special operations in small teams under Spartan conditions.”²⁵ With many similarities to the U.S. Army Special Forces Qualification Course, or Q-Course, as well as to the U.S. Navy Basic Underwater Demolitions/SEAL training, MARSOC ITC uses an incremental approach that teaches basic fundamental skills, then builds upon them throughout the seven-month curriculum to ultimately produce a highly-skilled and proficient special operations Marine. The subject matter of the different training blocks include an extensive shooting package, communications, medical, fire support, amphibious operations, and numerous hours of classroom instruction and field exercises to teach and perfect Direct Action, Special Reconnaissance, Foreign Internal Defense, and Counterinsurgency skills.²⁶

The amount of physical, logistical, and financial resources that are applied through this nearly year-long assessment, selection, and training pipeline to produce a single MARSOC critical skills operator is considerable. Due to an initial high failure rate at the first several A&S classes, MARSOC has even instituted a pre-A&S program called Assessment and Selection Preparatory and Orientation Course (ASPOC), which helps candidate further prepare physically and mentally for the rigors of A&S.²⁷ It also adds another three weeks to the overall training pipeline for a Marine special operator, and increases the price tag as well. The expense for the continued development of a SOF Marine grows considerably as he continues in follow-on

training schools, all of which increase the operational value of the individual Marine. Common additional training that many Marine special operators receive include insert schools such as airborne and combatant diver training, advanced shooting and close quarter battle schools, advanced driver training, and advanced language training, to name a few.²⁸

This list of training courses merely scratches the surface of the advanced training opportunities that Marine special operators receive. Beyond the fiscal and logistical support required from the Marine Corps to allow each SOF Marine to undergo all of this training is the physical, mental, emotional, and psychological requirements placed on each individual Marine. All of the skills possessed by a MARSOC operator are hard-earned, often under hazardous circumstances that have been increasingly honed to perfection as real-world deployments have increased for USSOCOM units, not only to Iraq and Afghanistan, but to places all around the globe.²⁹

Requirement for MARSOC SMCR Unit

The purpose of exploring the process by which Marines are recruited, assessed, selected and trained to be special operators to drive home a very important point. A great amount of time and resources are spent to identify the Marines with the potential to succeed in the SOF community. Once the Marines are identified, a great amount of time and resources are spent in equipping them with the essential basic and advanced skills that they are required to possess in order to successfully perform special operations missions as part of a Marine Special Operations Team, or MSOT.

Despite the intense time and effort that an individual Marine puts into becoming and being a MARSOC CSO, there are many who, like Marines and other servicemen of all backgrounds, choose to leave active service prior to reaching retirement eligibility. There are a

myriad of reasons why a highly-qualified service member would choose to do this, such as a desire to pursue continuing education or to take advantage of burgeoning career opportunities outside of the military. When a service member leaves active service prior to retirement eligibility, he or she is eligible to continue to serve as a member of his or her respective service's Reserve component. Although not always the case, it is typical for service members transitioning from active to reserve service to serve in a reserve unit in the same Military Occupational Specialty that is either the same or closely related to the one that they held while serving on active duty. A transitioning infantry Marine will typically serve in an infantry Reserve unit while a supply Marine will usually find assignment in some sort of Reserve logistics support role. This trend is common throughout the ranks and occupational specialties.³⁰

Unfortunately for MARSOC and the Marine Corps as a whole, the opportunity for SOF Marines to serve as a critical skills operator in operational Reserve SOF units does not exist. The only Reserve manpower structure that currently exists at MARSOC is in the form of Individual Mobilization Augmentee, or IMA, billets. IMA manpower structure is unlike Selected Marine Corps Reserve, or SMCR, manpower structure. SMCR units are the traditional Marine Reserve units which involve its members performing weekend drills once a month and annual training for two weeks during the summer months.³¹ The Reserve Marines who are members of SMCR units participate as members of an entire unit that has similar structure to an active duty unit. The best illustration of this would be an SMCR infantry battalion, such as 1st Battalion, 23rd Marine Regiment, or 1/23. This Reserve infantry battalion has a Table of Organization that includes maneuver companies and headquarters elements, each complete with the requisite number of infantry and support Marines to complete the mission of an active duty Marine infantry battalion. The organization structure of this Reserve unit mirrors that of its Active Component counterpart

infantry battalions. SMCR units of this sort will deploy as an entire unit, taking its entire slate of Marines and equipment into theater, vice piece-mealing individual Marines out to fill individual operational commitments.

Individual Mobilization Augmentee Reserve structure is considerably different from SMCR structure. It is a collection of individual staff support billets that require of the Reserve Marine the same amount of participation as that of an SMCR unit, but the drill days are performed in direct support to the staff section that the assigned billet supports. In the case of the IMA program at MARSOC, there are approximately thirty billets on the T/O that all support the primary staff functions of its headquarters. These are primarily in the administration, operations, and logistics sections, although there are a handful of these IMA billets that support other staff functions as well. None of these IMA billets are meant to be filled by critical skills operators, and none are designed to deploy in support of operational USSOCOM missions. SMCR structure must be created in the MARSOC T/O to properly utilize the capabilities of Reserve SOF Marines.³²

The absence of operational SMCR structure at MARSOC is a critical shortfall for several reasons. First, unlike the other branches of service, Marine SOF-qualified personnel who choose to leave active service but wish to continue to serve in a Reserve capacity are unable to do so under the MARSOC umbrella. The options for these Marines are limited and completely unbeneficial for MARSOC and the Marine Corps. They will either join another branch of service's Reserve SOF program, or they will not participate in Reserve service at all, which in both cases the Marine Corps loses out on its large investment of time and resources that were expended to create these SOF Marines.³³ A second shortfall that was alluded to earlier is the

opportunity cost associated with the loss of real-world SOF mission assignments due to the lack of available and qualified Marines to perform them.

As the current conventional fight continues to wane, the strategic, operational, and tactical environment of the major combatant commands will require the increased use of SOF units from all components of USSOCOM. As in the past decade, each Reserve SOF component will most certainly play a critical role in the accomplishment of these missions. As the spending cuts loom in the Department of Defense's budget and each service faces considerable budget cuts, the potential increase in the operational tempo of USSOCOM components, including their Reserve organizations, will lend itself instead to an increase in fiscal support for manpower and equipment.³⁴ The absence of a MARSOC Reserve component will diminish its ability to take on additional SOCOM missions and cut off a potential source of additional funding for operations and equipment.

While the Marine Corps, with its expeditionary warfighting capability and hard-earned reputation for being America's preeminent fighting force, has remained credible in the eyes of lawmakers and the American people as a whole, the creation of MARSOC has made it that much more relevant to the current fight. As with the other USSOCOM Reserve SOF units, a MARSOC Reserve SOF program would increase the relevancy of both MARSOC and the Marine Corps as a whole to the nation that both units were created to defend. After seven years of existence, MARSOC has efficiently developed its Active Component manpower structure and carved an important place for itself in the USSOCOM community. It is now time to develop a Selected Marine Corps Reserve SOF organization under the MARSOC chain of command.

Creating a MARSOC SMCR Unit

Much like the creation of MARSOC itself, the creation of a MARSOC Reserve component is no small task. On the surface, this task may seem even more difficult to accomplish given the constrained fiscal environment within which the Department of Defense is currently operating. There are two primary ways in which Reserve MARSOC structure could be created. The first is to simply create new structure that did not previously exist. The second, and the most palatable, would be to take existing SMCR structure and transition it into new MARSOC SMCR structure. Both courses of action will now be examined in order to assess their individual feasibility.

Creating new manpower structure, whether for the Active or Reserve Component of the Marine Corps, may seem to be the easiest way to bring a new unit into existence, but in actuality it is the least realistic path to the creation of a MARSOC SMCR unit. As mentioned, the tightening budget across the Department of Defense does not create an atmosphere that would be very receptive to the additional expense of creating additional manpower requirements. While the operational use of mobilized Reserve forces, both conventional and unconventional, had dramatically increased since September 11, 2001, and had reached a zenith in 2005, this trend is now decreasing as the requirements for troop support wane.³⁵ Due to this, the creation of new Reserve structure would be difficult to achieve in limited fiscal times.

A more realistic path to acquiring the required manpower structure for a MARSOC SMCR unit would be to transition existing Reserve structure under the MARSOC command apparatus for use as an operational Reserve unit. This idea is not new and is currently in practice with existing Reserve units that have been or will be transitioned to become completely new units. In 2011, the Marine Corps was directed by the Secretary of Defense to conduct a force

structure review with the purpose of determining the most appropriate manning levels and organization of its total force, including the Active and Reserve Components. The Marine Corps Force Structure Review Group, or FSRG, made several recommendations concerning manpower structure to be increased, eliminated, and changed for the total force of the Marine Corps over the next five fiscal years, including changes of several existing SMCR units.³⁶

One very notable change of this sort that will occur in Fiscal Year 2013 will be the transition of the 24th Marine Regiment, an infantry unit that could trace its proud lineage back to the island hopping campaigns of World War II, to a heretofore nonexistent Combat Logistics Regiment. This will also create a transfer of command over the unit from the 4th Marine Division, the Ground Combat Element of U.S. Marine Forces Reserve, to the 4th Marine Logistics Group, which commands all of the Logistics Combat Element forces of the same.³⁷ This transition will be made easier by the similarities between the units in size and structure, albeit with considerable administrative effort to ensure all minute personnel details, such as ensuring the proper military occupational specialties are correctly identified and entered in the new units T/O, are accomplished. Currently, the Selected Marine Corps Reserve is authorized an end strength of 39,600 Reserve Marines.³⁸ With further review, the identification of an existing SMCR unit that currently exists within that structure of 39,600 Reserve Marines that is most suited for transition to a Marine SOF Reserve unit is both achievable and advantageous.

In order to identify suitable existing SMCR structure for transition, an appropriate consideration must be the desired size and structure of the new MARSOC SMCR unit. When MARSOC was created in 2006, the main three main operational units were all approximately battalion-sized organizations, modeled loosely after a U.S. Army Special Forces battalion. The existing Marine Force Reconnaissance companies were re-designated as the 1st and 2nd Marine

Special Operations Battalions. The ambitiousness of this effort was certainly appropriate for the time, and the Active Component of MARSOC has since morphed into an organization with a single Marine Special Operations Regiment over the command of three MSOBs. The same zeal, however, would not be appropriate for the first incarnation of a MARSOC SMCR unit. The necessity of identifying the manpower, procuring equipment, and providing facilities for this new unit provide daunting enough challenges to discourage enthusiasm for exorbitant size. The organization must be of an adequate size to allow for a proof of concept, but must also be manageable at the same time. With these requirements in mind, the Marine Special Operations Company, or MSOC, possesses the ideal size and structure for the inaugural MARSOC SMCR unit. The MSOC, an organization generally made up of three fourteen-man Marine Special Operations Teams as well as numerous headquarters and support personnel, is a realistic and operationally useful model that could be efficiently created, manned, and equipped. The use of an MSOC model as the first MARSOC SMCR unit is the most feasible, but does not preclude the development of additional Reserve MSOCs or even MSOBs at a future date.

While MSOCs are normally part of the structure of a Marine Special Operations Battalion, which typically includes a total of four MSOCs, the command relationship of the SMCR MSOC would not necessarily need to fall directly under one of the existing active duty battalions. This Reserve MSOC, which in a drilling status would generally be present one weekend per month, could easily fall under the auspices of the Marine Special Operations Regiment or the MARSOC Headquarters itself. The MARSOC Reserve Integration Officer, who as a member of the MARSOC G-1, or administrative staff, currently is in charge of the aforementioned IMA program at the command. The administrative management of the MARSOC Reserve MSOC could easily and appropriately be placed under his or her cognizance,

until such time as appropriate Inspector and Instructor personnel could be assigned permanently to the unit. Inspector and Instructor, or I&I, personnel are typically active duty members of the Marine Corps Active or Reserve Components who are assigned as duty experts to a given Reserve unit in order to facilitate the fulfillment of its training, operational, administrative, and logistical requirements.³⁹ Administrative control (ADCON) of the MARSOC SMCR, like that of the Active Component MARSOC units, should fall directly under MARSOC and, ultimately, USSOCOM. Also, as with active MARSOC units, operational control (OPCON) over the MARSOC SMCR unit should be given to the Theater Special Operations Command, or TSOC, to which it will be assigned.

An additional consideration for this new MARSOC SMCR unit would be its location. The selection of a proper location for the facilities that will be utilized by this unit is paramount to it receiving the proper logistical and administrative support to be successful. In 2008, construction was begun on a new MARSOC headquarters compound at the Stone Bay section of Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. This compound, which saw a majority of its construction completed in 2011, became the home of not only the MARSOC headquarters elements, but also of the one of the three Marine Special Operations Battalions as well as various other support institutions that are vital to the completion of the MARSOC mission, including the Marine Special Operations School. Additionally, this extensive multi-million dollar compound includes key facilities, such as shooting ranges, training areas, and equipment that are vital to the successful sustainment training for Special Operations Marine units. The presence of these key facilities, as well as that of the Headquarters and crucial MARSOC support institutions, makes Stone Bay an ideal inaugural location for this new SMCR unit. While other locations may be considered, such as that of the West Coast-based 1st Marine Special Operations Battalion in the

Las Flores region of Camp Pendleton, California, the most realistic and effective consideration remains the MARSOC Headquarters Compound at Stone Bay.⁴⁰

Ultimately, a MARSOC SMCR unit could be created, staffed, equipped, and funded with marginal cost to the Marine Corps. Historically, Reserve forces are decidedly cheaper than Active Component forces. A reservist who trains for several weeks a year can maintain a high level of proficiency at one tenth the cost of his active duty counterpart, and can still directly contribute to the nation's defense when called.⁴¹ The use of existing Reserve Component manpower structure and the utilization of existing MARSOC facilities to support its formation would allow the standing up of an SMCR unit that would dramatically increase MARSOC's ability to perform critical SOF missions with minimal expense to the budgets of the Marine Corps and USSOCOM.

Recruiting and Reserve Retention Considerations

Finding qualified personnel to fill the ranks of this new Reserve MSOC is the next challenged that must be addressed. One manpower source has already been discussed, that being the active duty CSO Marine who have made the decision to transition to civilian life but wish continue military service in a Reserve status. MARSOC recently opened another door to Marine Reservists, albeit in an active duty status. According to Marine Administrative Message (MARADMIN) 042/12, which was released on January 23, 2012, Marine Reservist are now eligible to be recruited and screened to attend the MARSOC ASPOC and A&S on a temporary active duty orders, which are classified as Active Duty Operational Support (ADOS) orders.

Those Reservists that successfully complete ASPOC and A&S and are selected for attendance at ITC are allowed to extend their ADOS orders in order to do so. Upon successful completion of ITC, these highly-qualified Reserve Marines will be placed in an active duty status

for four years and assigned to one of the MARSOC MSOBs for further service. This same approach of recruiting qualified Marines from the Reserve Component for active MARSOC service would also be entirely appropriate to fill the ranks of the MARSOC Reserve MSOC. The same orders process would allow the command to send these Reserve Component candidates through ASPOC, A&S, and ITC. Upon successful completion of these, the Marines could then be assigned to the Reserve MSOC to serve as drilling Reservists.⁴²

These two sources, the MARSOC Marine transitioning from active service, and the drilling Reservist who wishes continue his Reserve service at an operational MARSOC unit are the sole reservoirs from which a MARSOC SMCR unit can be staffed. Recruiting from the general civilian population, as the rest of the Marine Corps Total Force does, would be inappropriate considering the maturity and experience required to serve in a Marine Special Operations unit, particularly one that serves in a part-time Reserve status. This raises a concerning question of whether or not these sources will be adequate to fill the ranks of a burgeoning new Marine SOF Reserve unit. Part of the answer can be taken from research done by the Center for Naval Analysis (CNA), a Washington, D. C.-based think tank that has completed extensive studies on Marine Corps Reserve retention and affiliation behavior.⁴³ The CNA studies found that Reserve Component Marines had been greatly affected by the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts due to a drastic increase in mobilization and deployments that last, on average, twelve to fifteen months. This is a trend that had a considerable effect on the ability of the Marine Corps Reserve to entice Reserve Marines, most of whom are required to balance civilian employment along with military service, to continue their participation. Overall, the CNA studies have found that, in general, the Reserve Component of the Marine Corps will

continue to see the transition of qualified Marines into Reserve service, particularly as the Active Component decreases its manpower structure and nationwide unemployment remains an issue.⁴⁴

Future Benefits of MARSOC Reserve

Active Component MARSOC Marines, particularly with their tradition of excellence in expeditionary warfare, have become an integral piece of the USSOCOM team. They are a necessity to the successful completion of the myriad of requirements placed on the U.S. special operations community. Likewise, an operational MARSOC SMCR unit is necessary in order to bring the same quality of SOF operator to the USSOCOM Reserve Component. The benefits of having an operational MARSOC Reserve unit are tangible. In addition to contributing to the continued SOF footprint in Afghanistan and other current operations, there are continuing opportunities arising that would be ideal for Reserve SOF use. On December 31, 2012, a memo signed by Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta gave approval to bring Special Operations Command-North (SOCNORTH) into existence.⁴⁵ As part of the United States Northern Command (NORTHCOM), SOCNORTH will be the operational command for all SOF operations within the NORTHCOM area of responsibility, which includes Canada and Mexico. The continuing conflict between the Mexican government and illegal drug cartels has created an opportunity for U.S. SOF to conduct training missions with Mexican military units in order to combat transnational criminal organizations.

This specific mission would be ideal for MARSOC Reserve SOF units to engage in on a traditional part-time basis. The proximity of Mexico to the United States would lend itself to reasonably easy travel to develop the habitual relationships necessary for such joint training missions to be successful. MARSOC Marines, in particular, will possess the abundance of the required skills to make this mission a success. With its FID core competency, the Reserve

MSOC would be the ideal choice to execute the burgeoning Mexico mission under the auspices of SOCNORTH.

An additional benefit MARSOC will receive from the addition of qualified Reserve personnel is the potential skill sets that these Marines will bring from their civilian occupations. This is already happening in existing Reserve SOF units. Major Thomas K. Sarrouf, United States Army, writes the following concerning civilian police experience brought to the National Guard SOF units operating in Iraq:

Law enforcement capabilities already exist within the SOF community in the two National Guard Special Forces Groups. A recent RAND study on enhancing the contributions of National Guard Special Forces revealed that among the civilian skill sets that were possessed by National Guard Special Forces, law enforcement/security professions were the largest portion of the force, at an estimated ratio of 3:1. Based on extrapolated estimates from the personnel participating in the survey, the estimated number of National Guard Special Forces personnel with a law enforcement skill set is 1,040.²¹ This number represents ...an asset available to USSOCOM, the force provider to the COCOM and their theater security cooperation plans.⁴⁶

While this example focuses on law enforcement skills, the expanded experiences and skill sets that these Reserve special operators possessed directly contributed to the success of the greater mission. This opportunity exists for MARSOC, as well, with the inclusion of Reserve SOF Marines.

Conclusion

The U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Special Operations command has achieved many milestones since its February 2006 creation. In almost seven years, it has fielded three Marine Special Operations Battalions that have participated in USSOCOM missions around the globe, including the war in Afghanistan. It has manned several critical supporting institutions, including the Marine Special Operations Support Group and the Marine Special Operations Intelligence Battalion, both of which provide critical support to special operations Marines that

make their mission accomplishment possible. It has developed the Marine Special Operations School, which has successfully carried out the critical task of assessing, selecting, and training Marine CSOs in basic and advanced skills that allow them to carry out the special operations missions that are assigned to them. It has achieved the creation and validation of a training pipeline that can award a primary MOS to enlisted Marine CSOs and an additional MOS for Special Operations Officers, allowing for permanent assignment to the Marine SOF ranks. Most importantly, it has earned its place as a competent SOF component of USSOCOM, joining the ranks of the other elite branches of U.S. military service. The next great milestone for MARSOC is to follow in the footsteps of its sister USSOCOM components and create an operational Reserve unit capable of enhancing its warfighting capability. This will be necessary not only to open the doors for future operational commitments and funding, but also to attract and keep highly-qualified Marine CSOs in the organization should they decide to leave active duty.

There are realistic avenues of creating the requisite manpower structure, the most feasible of which would be the not unprecedented realignment of existing Marine Corps Reserve structure to meet the needs of a MARSOC SMCR unit. There are also realistic options of the provision of administrative, logistic, and facility support to such a unit at the existing command headquarters. Special Operations Reserve units have and will continue to play a vital role of in the accomplishment of USSOCOM missions. After seven years of existence, the time has come for the development of an operational MARSOC Reserve Component capable of carrying out SOF missions, enhancing the Command's effectiveness, and holding on to precious Marine CSO assets.

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APPENDIX A

Special Operations Forces Core Activities

Direct Action (DA) – Short duration strikes and other small-scale offensive actions taken to seize, destroy, capture, or recover in denied areas.

Special Reconnaissance (SR) – Acquiring information concerning the capabilities, intentions, and activities of the enemy.

Foreign Internal Defense (FID) – Providing training and other assistance to foreign governments and their militaries to enable the foreign government to provide for its country's national security.

Unconventional Warfare (UW) – Operations conducted by, through, and with surrogate forces that are organized, trained, equipped, supported, and directed by external forces.

Civil Affairs Operations (CA) – Activities that establish, maintain, or influence relations between U.S. forces and foreign civil authorities and civilian populations to facilitate U.S. military operations.

Counterterrorism (CT) – Measures taken to prevent, deter, and respond to terrorism.

Psychological Operations (PSYOPS) – Operations that provide truthful information to foreign audiences that influence behavior in support of U.S. military operations.

Information Operations (IO) – Operations designed to achieve information superiority by adversely affecting enemy information and systems while protection U.S. information and systems.

Counterproliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction – Actions taken to locate, seize, destroy or capture, recover and render such weapons safe.

Security Force Assistance – Unified action by joint, interagency, intergovernmental and multinational community to sustain and assist host nation or regional security forces in support of legitimate authority.

Counterinsurgency Operations (COIN) – Those military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological, and civic actions taken by a government to defeat insurgency.

*All definitions were taken from the USSOCOM Fact Book, 2013

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